

Scientific Sprague

The Exploits of a New Kind of Detective

By Francis Lynde

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Stella Sprague (niece, professor, government agent and former subject) comes to the city. She is a young woman of unusual intelligence and energy, who is determined to solve the mystery of the disappearance of her uncle, Dr. Sprague. She is a young woman of unusual intelligence and energy, who is determined to solve the mystery of the disappearance of her uncle, Dr. Sprague.

CHAPTER V.

The High Kibosh.

"I was," admitted the self-confessed simpleton, matching his accuser's grin. "Since you've guessed that much, I'll tell you a little more. I saw her first on your eastbound train, the train that took on the sham dead man at Little Butte and afterward picked up your office car. You'll remember you asked me to play over a day or two with you in the water, and I did. As a matter of fact your persuasion wasn't needed. I would have stopped off anyway, because the girl stopped off."

"Richard, I have been seven weeks ago! In all my knocking around with you and Starbuck and Stillings and the rest of you, not one man in the bunch has thought it worth his while to tell me that there is a cottage settlement of Eastern summer people up in the mountains on Lake Topaz. I had to blunder around and find out for myself, as I did last Wednesday, when Starbuck took me up to your mine on Mount Geesey. There isn't much to tell. I found her last year, she is stopping with an aunt of hers, and by chance—good luck you'd say—I have something a little better than a speaking acquaintance with the aunt—though I'm sure common friends in New York. There's nothing to it, Richard. The girl can have her pick—she has already turned down a couple of English titles—and she isn't going to pick any such overgrown idiot of a man as your humble, Let's talk about something else."

The big chemistry expert with the athletic slant was moving uneasily in his chair. After a little interval of silence he said: "I can't be with you in any more of these little two-steps with the money trust, Richard. I'm going back to Washington to-morrow."

Maxwell's start carried him half way out of his chair, and he dropped his short pipe and broke the stem of it. "Great Scott, Calvin—don't say that!" he implored. "You can't throw us down that way! Why, good Lord, man, if it hadn't been for you and your brains—"

"There's no use in talking about it; you simply can't go and leave us hanging over the ragged edge!"

"I can, and I guess I must," insisted Sprague, getting a little more of it. "I can't tell you or anybody else the why. It's just up to me, and I've got it to do."

Maxwell's perturbation had cleared his brain. "You mean," he broke out, "is the girl mixed up in it?"

"She is," was the brief admission. "She is gone, or going—back East, mean?"

"No; not immediately, I believe," Maxwell had driven out to the clubhouse on the shore of Lake Corona in his sports car, and he was now sitting in the town Sprague occupied the mechanic's seat beside him.

It was thus that happened that he climbed the stairs to the second story of the railroad building through the door of the despatcher's room. Connelly, the fat night despatcher, was at his desk, tapping the counter with the counter rattle, and when he saw the superintendent he held up a pudgy hand.

"Benson's been trying to get you on the wire from Copah for an hour or more, Mr. Maxwell," he said. "I didn't know where to raise you."

"Is he on the wire now?" asked Maxwell, letting himself and his companion through the wicket in the counter rail.

"No, but I'll call him for you." Followed a sharp rattle of the key and a few broken syllables from the sounder, and then the despatcher got up out of his chair. "Here he is," he said. "He wants to talk to you, personally."

He was behind the closed door of the superintendent's room, after Sprague had chosen the easiest of the three chairs and settled himself for a smoke. "Well, Mr. Lynde," he said, "I'm going to miss you like the devil, Calvin; I'm missing you right now."

Sprague blew a series of smoke rings toward the disused gas fixture hanging from the centre of the ceiling.

Something that Chief Engineer Benson has been telling you over the wire from Copah?" he suggested.

"Benson has struck something that he can't account for. For a week or more the Transcontinental people have been gathering a working camp at the Copah end of the bridge on which their Jack's Canyon branch crosses the main line. Nobody seems to know what they are going to do, or where they are going to do it. At Leekhard's suggestion I sent Benson over to try and find out."

"And he hasn't found out what the 'C' folks have in mind?"

"No, he hasn't. It is plainly some sort of a track-laying job. I saw them mine in a hundred or more scraper teams in camp, a trainload of new steel and forty carloads of cross-ties. And this afternoon they brought down a mechanical rail-layer—machine much used nowadays for rushing a job of track-laying."

The big guest smoked reflectively for a few minutes and then he said: "No jangle with the Copah city authorities about any trackage rights in the town, or street crossings, or anything of that kind."

"Not that I have ever heard of. The T.C. has its own Copah yard, and has a switching connection with the Pacific Southwestern yard tracks; though, naturally, there is a free exchange of business between the two competitive systems."

"Do they connect with you?" asked Sprague.

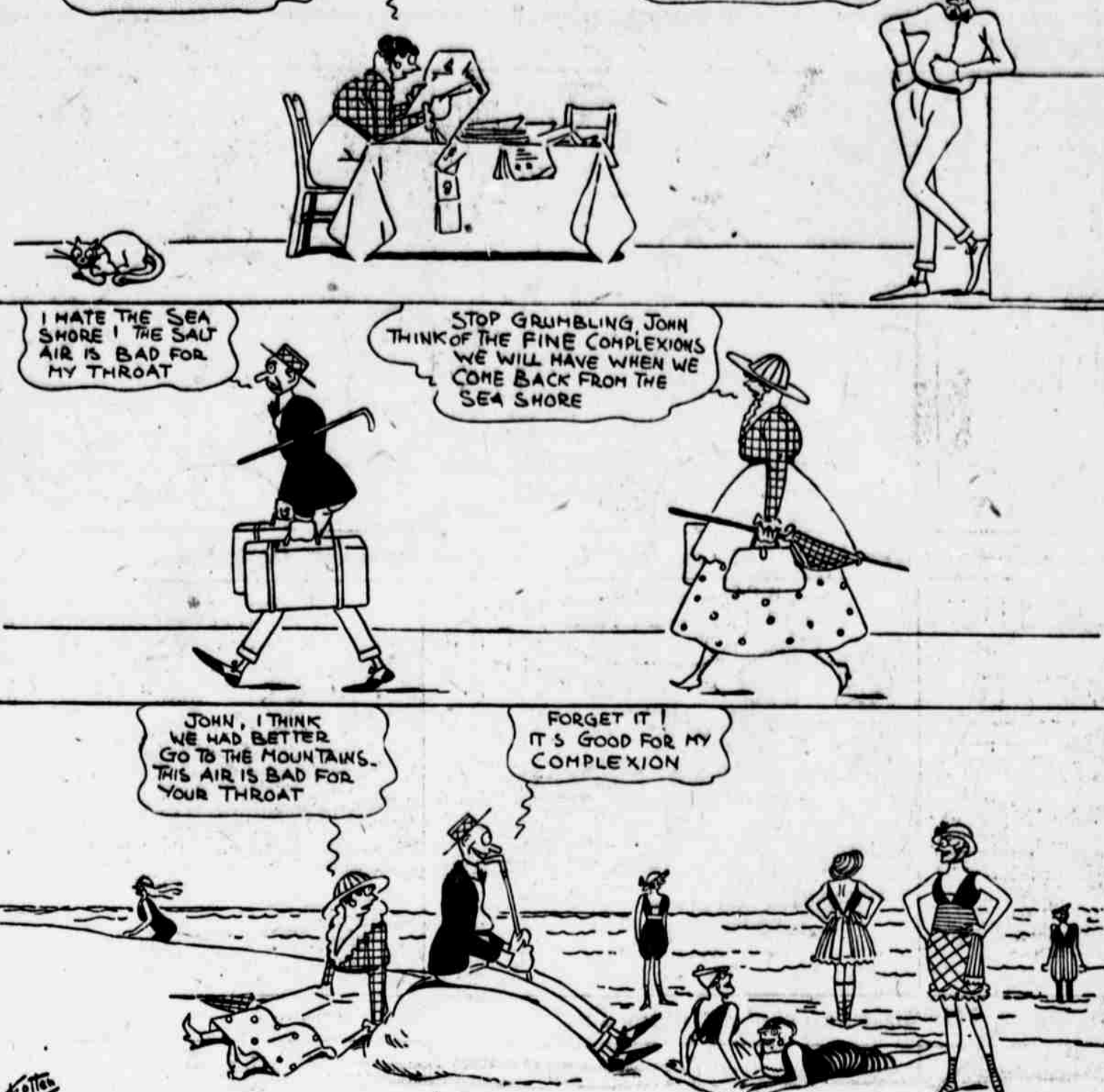
Such Is Life!

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By Maurice Ketten

THE MOUNTAINS ARE BAD FOR MY HEART JOHN. LET'S GO TO THE SEA SHORE. THE SALT AIR IS GOOD FOR THE COMPLEXION.

I HATE THE SEA SHORE! THE SALT AIR IS BAD FOR MY THROAT. LET'S GO TO THE MOUNTAINS.



would stop them. Benson says there are between four and five hundred men in that gang, and many of them are armed."

CHAPTER VI.

The Invasion.

SPRAGUE nodded. "It is a right to a finish, as I told you last night. And they have the advantage because we don't know yet where or how they are going to hit us. Have you communicated with Ford?"

"I have tried to; but I don't get any reply."

"Tally," said the big man on the opposite side of the table. "I've been having the same kind of bad luck. I can't locate Stillings."

"Did you try his house?"

"I did that first. His family is out of town, and he has been stopping at the club. But nobody there seems to know anything about him. A little after midnight I found your division detective, young Tarbell, and he and I went to his house."

"Not yet; it is beginning to look as if he had dropped out. But the day is still young. You'd better go up stairs and get a little sleep. I'll stay on deck and call you if you are in."

Maxwell had finished his simple breakfast and he took the good advice. It was nine hours later, and the electric wires were twinkling yellow in the sunset pinks and grays flooding the quiet Sunday evening streets and the railroad plaza, when he came down and found Sprague just ready to go to bed.

"News!" demanded the superintendent eagerly. "I had no idea of how the day was going. But Sprague made him wait until they were seated at a table for two in the corner of the cafe."

"The Copah fight is over and the T.C. people have broken into the corner of their new track," the expert announced briefly. "Benson had to give up and go to bed about noon, but Leekhard has kept up posted. The track is in, and frogged to a connection with your main line; and the entire attacking force has camped 'own at the two points of trespass, presumably to keep you and Leekhard from interfering and tearing up their job. Move No. 1, whatever it may mean, is a move accomplished."

"I can't understand it. I can't begin to understand!" said Maxwell in despair. "And then: 'No word yet from Ford?'"

"No. And what is more to the point, there is none from Stillings nor from Tarbell. I'm beginning to think that this is a bigger game than any we've played yet. Dick, I dug up Editor Kendall of the Tribune this afternoon and had a little heart-to-heart talk with him. There is big trouble of some kind in the air; he has smelt it. He has young men out everywhere, 'on suspicion,' and he has promised to keep in touch with us up to the time his paper goes to press."

"That ought to help us to get at the facts," said the superintendent. "Kendall is our friend, and he has some mighty keen young fellows on his staff. By the way, there's one of them now—just coming in at the door. He's looking for somebody, too."

The young inquirer was not long in finding his man. With a nod to the head waiter he came across to Sprague's table. "A note for you, Mr. Sprague—from Mr. Kendall," he said. "There's no answer, I'm afraid, and he went on to another table and began to chat with two other young men, strangers to Maxwell, who had come in on the evening train."

Sprague glanced at his note and passed it across the table. Maxwell read it and found that it merely added to the mystery without offering anything in the way of enlightenment.

"Dear Sprague: Have followed your suggestion, and our young men have spotted at least a score of the strangers at the different hotels. Nobody seems to know any of them, and they won't talk. You will find a list of names, copied from the hotel registers, on inclosed slip. It has occurred to me that Maxwell might know some of them, if your suspicions are well founded."

"KENDALL."

Maxwell frowned over the list for a moment before handing it back to Sprague. "Tom Carmody is a division superintendent on the west end of the T.C., and this man Hunnivald Vance Jackson is, or used to be, Carmody's chief despatcher; and—why, say! this is a T.C. crowd; here's And Cochran, their Canyon Division trainmaster."

"Any more?" asked Sprague, quietly.

"No; the other names are all strangers to me."

Sprague took the list and pointed with a square-ended forefinger to one of the names.

"This man Dimmock, you don't know him?" he queried.

"No."

"Well, I don't know him, either; but I happen to know something about him. Two years ago I was doing a little work down in Oklahoma. It was during the time they were having the scrap with the oil companies. Mr. Dimmock was there, ostensibly as an independent capitalist in oil wells, but really as a representative of the trust."

"Is this the same man?"

"The expert held his fork pointing diagonally across his plate. 'Follow the line of this fork,' he directed in low tones, 'and you'll see him—at the further table by the door.'"

Maxwell looked and saw a generously built, smooth shaven, cold featured man who looked like big money, dining at a table alone. The big money look was not obtrusive; but it was sufficiently apparent in the way of the Sunday broadcloth, in the spotless linen, and not least in the attitude of the obsequious waiter who followed him to the table.

"I loved the trouble to look up Mr. Dimmock in the Oklahoma period," Sprague went on. "I found that he was pretty well known in New York as the right hand of a certain great money lord whose name we needn't mention here. That being the case, it is hardly necessary to add that his presence in Brewster at this particular crisis is a bit ominous."

"Have you told Kendall this about Dimmock?" asked the superintendent.

"No, but he'll be pretty sure to trace the gentleman for himself. Where a question of pure news is involved it is hardly necessary to add that his presence in Brewster at this particular crisis is a bit ominous."

"But that doesn't help us out any," Maxwell objected.

"No. We seem to be forced to await developments, and that, Richard, is always a mark of the losing side. I wish to goodness Stillings would turn up."

"It's odd about Bob. He doesn't often drop out without leaving a trail behind him. Have you finished? Then let's go over to the office and see if there is any further word from Benson or Leekhard."

"It was when they were leaving the dining room together that they came upon Tarbell, the ex-trainmaster of Montana cattle thieves. The young man was way worn and dusty, and his eyes were red for want of sleep. Sprague's question was the one he asked."

"You've found him, Archer?"

"Yes; as good as," was the short rejoinder.

"Turn it loose," commanded Sprague. "He's at the bottom of an old prospect hole up on Mount Baldy; him and Mr. Maxwell's brother-in-law, Billy Starbuck. I had to come back to town to get a rope to pull 'em out."

"What?" said Maxwell. "How did they get there?"

"The young special deputy shook his head. "I don't know the why or wherefore any more 'n a gust," he said simply. "I got onto it through the barkeep" at the road-house out on the Topaz pike. He said a bunch of fellows came along in an auto late last night and stopped for drinks. They came in two at a time, and two of 'em didn't come in at all. Just as they were startin' off there was a scrap of some sort in the auto, and the barkeep, who was lookin' out of the window, swore to me he got a glimpse of the car, and it sure looked as if it followed 'em. They left the road this side of the lake, crossed the Gloria on the bridge, and showed that machine up an old wood trail on Baldy's side."

"Well, go on," said Maxwell impatiently.

"I found where they'd stopped and took Mr. Stillings and Billy out of the car, and it sure looked as if there'd been another scrap, the way the bushes were tore up. About a quarter back from the trail I found the hole Starbuck hollered up at me when I peeked in. I couldn't see 'em none, but Billy he said they was both there, and wasn't hurt none to speak of—only in their feelins'. He told me to chase back and get a rope."

"Maxwell looked at his watch. "How deep is this hole, Archer?"

"'Bout a hundred foot, or maybe more."

"I'll get a car and go after them. The superintendent's instant decision. "You say this was last night; have they had anything to eat?"

"Yep; Billy said a basket of grub had been lowered down to 'em a little while after they were chucked in."

"All right. Go over to the shops and get a coil of rope out of the wrecking car, and I'll get an auto. Want to go along, Calvin?"

"Sure," was the prompt reply. Maxwell, being a reasonably wealthy mine owner as well as the superintendent of the railroad, kept two cars—a runabout and a big touring machine—which, in the absence of his family, were both housed in a down-town garage. In the big car the twenty-mile drive over the Topaz Lake pike was quickly made.

Just before they came to the bridge over the Gloria they passed an auto with two men in it going toward town. Oddly enough, as it seemed, the inbound car gave them a wide berth, steering almost into the ditch at the passing, and speeding up to a racing clip as soon as the ditched machine had been yanked back into the roadway. Tarbell, who was driving the car, was stopped, jumped out and examined the tracks of the other car by the help of a lighted match.

"That's them," he said laconically, when he resumed the steering wheel. "That was the same car. It's got a set of them new-fangled tires with creepsers on 'em."

"Hurry!" snapped Maxwell. "We don't know what they're doing to Stillings and Billy this time."

Happily they soon found that the evening visit of the two unknown men to the abandoned prospect shaft had been a charitable rather than a malevolent. Stillings, who was the first of the two captives to be hauled out of the dark pit on the mountain side, told them that another basket of food had just been lowered by a string into the shaft. And when Starbuck came up he brought the basket with him.

Singularly enough, the two rescued ones had no explanation to offer; or, at least, none that served to explain anything. It transpired that they had dined together in the town house, and then they had gone to the theatre together. After the play they had taken taxi to go to Stillings's house in the suburbs to sleep. An auto had followed them, and when they had dismissed the taxi they had been set upon by a number of masked men who tumbled out of the pursuing car. Since they had no weapons they were quickly overpowered, thrown into the car, carried off to the mountains, and dumped into the prospect hole.

By the way, they had been lowered by being thrown in after them. That was all.

"And you don't know what it was for?" asked Sprague, when they were rolling evenly back to the city with Starbuck at the steering-wheel.

"No more than you do," was the lawyer's answer. Billy and I have speculated over it all day—having no other way of amusing ourselves—and it's a perfectly blind trail. Billy says he knows I must have been the one they were after, and I say he must have been the one. You can take your choice."

At the club town house the two rescued ones were set down. Tarbell was released to go and get his well-earned rest after the twenty-four-hour task of shadow work.

"Get yourself in shape to go on an advisory committee to see how we can, as you can, Robert," was Sprague's injunction to the attorney; and then Maxwell drove down to the railroad building, and the expert was with him when he went up to the despatcher's office.

There was no more news from the Copah end of the bridge, and the two rescued ones were set down. Tarbell was released to go and get his well-earned rest after the twenty-four-hour task of shadow work.

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NEXT WEEK'S COMPLETE NOVEL IN THE EVENING WORLD

Jacqueline of Golden River

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

at his desk the big bodied man from Washington sat out on the loggia porch of the hotel smoking in thought and staring absently at the swimming pool. The most head electric in the railroad yard diagonally opposite.

The Monday morning dawned bright and fair, as a vast majority of the mornings do in the favored interior mountain paradise known as Timanovon Park. Notwithstanding his loss Sunday evening Maxwell came down late to his breakfast, and the waiter told him that Sprague had eaten at his usually early hour and was gone.

While he was waiting to be served through the breakfast room Maxwell was a rather excited first-page news story of the track-laying fight at Copah. The story was evidently an Associated Press dispatch, and was carefully non-committal in its references to the Transcontinental's purpose in rushing the new trackage through a connection with the Nevada Short Line yards.

None the less, the impression was given that the Southwestern's opposition to the move had been only perfunctory and for public effect. Also, the impression was given that the Copah public, at least, believed that there was a secret understanding between the two railroad corporations. Turning to the inside pages, Maxwell found no editorial comment on the news story, and he was still wondering why Editor Kendall had missed his chance when Stillings came in and took the chair at the end of the table.

"They told me I'd find you here," said the lawyer, "and I wanted to have a word with you before the wheels begin to go round. This is our court on the issue of damages suit, and we'll have to fish or cut bait this time. In all probability, we won't be able to get another postponement, and if we let the case come to trial it's all over. I've got to give Nixon his verdict, if only for the reason that he is one man fighting a corporation. The only question is, shall I try to compromise before it is too late?"

"Is there any chance for a compromise?" asked Maxwell.

"I don't know positively. Blotchford was a good deal more than a figure was so high that I refused to talk to him."

"It's a hold-up!" snapped the superintendent shortly. "I haven't changed my mind."

"All right," said the attorney, rising to go. "I thought I'd give you one last chance at it. The case is called for 10 o'clock in Judge Watson's court. If you're foot-loose you might come up and see me before I guess that is what it will come to."

And then, as he was turning to go, he said: "By the way, that was a mighty cold-blooded question, the people did yesterday, wasn't it? What does it mean?"

"If Sprague hasn't told you, I'm sure I can't," said Maxwell.

"I haven't seen Sprague. He left a note at the office this morning, saying he'd be around later; but he hasn't shown up yet. Will you come over to his house and see the jury snafu?"

Quite naturally the hardworking superintendent had no notion of waiting his forenoon in a courtroom, and he said so to the lawyer. Stillings's departure and the finishing of the late breakfast, he went across to his office and plunged into the day's work.

There was an unusual quantity of the work that morning, it seemed, and no sooner was he through with one file of referred papers than Calmiche, the chief clerk, came in with another. Only once during the forenoon was the steady office grind lightened by an interruption from the Southwestern side. At 10 o'clock Benson T.C. track layers were at work again, carefully surfacing and ballasting the new track as if it were to be a permanent one.

Maxwell broke the routine pace long enough to dictate to Calmiche the reply to Benson's note. He was ready to go to the office, but he was held back by a still more serious charge, namely, that the railroad was not only unwilling to pay the just claims upon it, but was unable to do so in effect, practically bankrupt, as the thick stacks of affidavits, which he had piled up to the judge, would sufficiently prove.

"After that," Stillings went on, "this was bluff! Bang! and the fight was over. Judge Watson merely glanced through the affidavits—which may or may not be true. Before I was charged with malicious arrest, I was charged with the ends of justice, he summed up with a still more serious charge, namely, that the railroad was not only unwilling to pay the just claims upon it, but was unable to do so in effect, practically bankrupt, as the thick stacks of affidavits, which he had piled up to the judge, would sufficiently prove."

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